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RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 4083  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 9243  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 0325  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 006865

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: CATHOLIC CHURCH, GUARANTORS SAY GOC-ELN TALKS  
LOSING MOMENTUM

REF: BOGOTA 5496 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood  
Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) Secretary General of the Commission on National Reconciliation, Father Dario Echeverri, and civil society guarantors Moritz Akerman and Alvaro Jimenez said the GOC-ELN exploratory talks were slowing down and would likely resume in Havana in late September rather than on August 12 as originally planned. They claimed FARC attacks on the ELN and Cuban pressure were the principal factors explaining the slower pace. Echeverri argued the ELN Central Command was losing control of its troops, characterizing ELN troops in the field as "materially and spiritually poor," and suggesting they were increasingly turning to drug trafficking. End summary.

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Church, Guarantors Say FARC, Cubans Slow Down GOC-ELN Talks  
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¶2. (C) Echeverri told us on July 21 the GOC-ELN exploratory talks had slowed down, principally because the ELN was suffering from FARC attacks, especially in Arauca Department. The FARC had threatened further attacks if the ELN discussed disarmament or demobilization with the GOC. Echeverri said ELN military commander and negotiator Antonio Garcia called him recently from Venezuela to ask for Echeverri's personal mediation efforts in Arauca. ELN negotiator Francisco Galan wanted Echeverri to tell the FARC that the ELN wanted to "resolve differences" with them. Echeverri said the Arauca dispute was about drugs. Echeverri planned to take a bishop and four priests from Arauca to meet with ELN negotiator Francisco Galan at the Casa de Paz in Medellin. He said the priests have relationships with FARC leaders in Arauca and would be able to transmit or receive messages to or from the FARC.

¶3. (C) On July 19, Akerman and Jimenez also highlighted ELN fear of the FARC, adding that Cuban pressure on the ELN to move slowly was also having an effect. Akerman said former Cuban Ambassador to Colombia Tony Lopez met with Galan at the Casa de Paz about two weeks ago. Akerman attended a lunch with Galan and Lopez on the same day, at which Lopez

criticized Akerman for trying to move the exploratory talks from Havana. Akerman emphasized that the Cubans had always regarded it as a mistake for the ELN to move forward in the absence of a FARC seat at the table.

¶4. (C) Akerman claimed Peace Commissioner Restrepo told Galan the GOC remained unwilling to move from exploratory talks with the ELN to addressing a substantive agenda, "because we want to wait on the FARC." Akerman said the guarantors were surprised at Restrepo's comments, which he claimed persuaded some of the more forward-leaning ELN Central Command (COCE) members to back off and accept a slower pace. (The guarantors have previously said the COCE favored early substantive talks with the goal of running ELN candidates in the 2007 municipal elections.) Rather than start the fourth round of talks on August 12 as planned, Akerman said the slower pace and Cuban administrative problems suggested the talks might not get underway until late September, after the NAM Summit in Cuba.

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Concern that COCE Losing Control of Troops  
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¶5. (C) Echeverri (echoed by Akerman, and National Conciliation Commission member Ernesto Borda) said the COCE was losing control of its fighters in the field. Echeverri argued that ELN fronts in Narino and Choco Departments worked closely with the FARC on narcotics trafficking. In south eastern Choco, he said, the ELN "takes orders from the FARC." By contrast, the ELN and FARC "are at each other's throats" in Arauca, largely because they failed to come to an agreement on dividing drug spoils. Echeverri noted he had recently visited ELN fronts in Norte de Santander Department

and was "shocked at their material and spiritual poverty." The ELN rank and file had scruffy boots and wore stolen Colombian army uniforms that still contained the Colombian flag emblem and the name of the original owner. Echeverri asked some ELN members why they did not show more pride in their appearance and one replied, "ask the leaders about spiritual or ideological views, we don't have any." In Echeverri's view, the miserable conditions in which ELN members live make them ripe recruits for the drug trade.

¶6. (C) Echeverri characterized an aggressive recent statement by ELN leader Nicolas Rodriguez (aka Gabino) as "not surprising" and said it reflected a strand of ELN opinion opposed to talks with the GOC. Rodriguez said the ELN had never uttered the word demobilization, far less had considered laying down its arms. In Echeverri's view, the fact that the statement was signed by Rodriguez and not by the COCE signaled divisions within the ELN.

¶7. (C) Akerman highlighted a July 6 statement by the ELN "comuneros del sur" front in Narino, which said drugs were poison and should not be allowed to infect communities. He suggested the statement was a response to COCE pressure on the front to stop drug trafficking. Still, Akerman conceded he had no evidence the ELN in Narino had stopped drug trafficking. Akerman also passed on Galan's concern that recently arrested ELN members had been interviewed by the FBI regarding kidnapping cases. Akerman said Galan denied the ELN had kidnapped Americans. Galan is worried that the U.S. will seek to extradite leading ELN figures.

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Norwegians Said to be Interested  
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¶8. (C) Akerman reported the trip he took to Oslo in June with Jimenez was successful and the Norwegians were mulling over additional involvement. He said the Norwegian MFA's Johan Vibe was skeptical of the ELN financial proposal (reftel) but regarded Norwegian in-kind contributions (such as boots and food) as possible, as long as the GOC agreed. Akerman understood that Vibe would address further Norwegian engagement with the ELN and GOC in the coming weeks.

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Comment  
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19. (C) We are continuing to support the process with the ELN. We are also hearing increased support for a go-slow approach while the process with the paramilitaries, especially the judicial part, remains a subject of debate, so the ELN process does not weaken the government's approach to the paras. Finally, we hear that the ELN would like to accelerate the process so that it can play some role in the fall 2007 local elections, something that would not be possible if it received the same treatment as the paramilitaries.

WOOD